



## **NOAA, NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE, WEATHER FORECAST OFFICE**

**Miami, Florida 33165**

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*Heavy frost and steam rising from Caloosahatchee River in Moore Haven on December 28, 2010  
(photo by Angie Snow, Glades County Emergency Management)*

### **Friday February 3rd:**

### **Temperature Extremes and Wildfire Awareness Day**

Although a mild and sunny climate is south Florida's greatest natural asset, extremes of heat and cold can and do occur from time to time. These extremes can be harmful and even fatal if people do not take precautions. The heat and humidity of summer can combine to cause temperatures to feel more like 105 degrees on many days, which present a significant health risk even to those used to warm weather. Heat index values

rarely reach 110 degrees in South Florida, but when they do, the risk of life threatening heat stroke increases dramatically. At least three known incidents of heat exposure involving school children and athletes were reported last year in South Florida; however heat-exposure related incidents are notoriously under-reported and it's likely that many cases of heat exposure occur yearly in South Florida due to the persistent heat and humidity common throughout much of the year.

The number-one protection against heat exposure is simply to stay out of the heat, especially during the hottest times of the day. If outside, make sure to drink plenty of water and take frequent breaks in the shade.

Although you can't feel it or see it, ultraviolet radiation can cause damage to the skin and eyes, even on seemingly cloudy days or in shady areas. Ultraviolet radiation, or simply UV radiation, is strong most of the year in subtropical latitudes such as south Florida. The peak hours of UV radiation are normally between 10 am and 2 pm when a high sun angle allows much of the energy to penetrate to the surface. The body's quick response to excessive UV radiation causes sunburn, which can happen in only a matter of minutes. Prolonged or excessive exposure has been proven to cause potentially fatal skin cancer or cataracts, a form of blindness. About 90 percent of all skin cancer cases are linked to UV radiation. Put on sunblock, especially on children, when planning to be outdoors for a prolonged period of time.

In an area known for its mild winters, it's hard to imagine life-threatening cold, but freezing temperatures do occur over at least parts of south Florida on a yearly basis. Recent cold snaps can attest to this. During the several record-breaking cold episodes of January and December 2010, freezing temperatures occurred over almost all of south Florida, impacting both people and crops. Two people died as a result of hypothermia in January 2010 and an additional 7 people were injured from carbon monoxide poisoning. South Florida's agricultural industry suffered losses in the millions of dollars as a direct result of the freezing temperatures.

Products such as freeze watches and warnings, and wind chill watches, warnings and advisories alert the public to the threat of potentially life threatening cold temperatures.

During cold events, be extremely careful when using heating devices as deaths often occur as a result of faulty equipment or from improper use. Never use candles or cooking grills indoors, and be very careful with space heaters. Check your heating equipment at least once a year to make sure it is in proper working conditions. Check on the elderly to make sure they have adequate heating. Protect pets and plants during significant cold episodes.

The threat of wildfires is pronounced during the spring months from March through May when the dry season coincides with increasing sun angle and warmer temperatures. Most of South Florida is currently experiencing drought conditions, and

these conditions are expected to linger and likely get worse through the peak of the wildfire season. Therefore, all persons are strongly urged to follow the advice of forestry and fire safety officials to avoid causing wildfires. Many South Florida wildfires are the result of human activities. Be careful when discarding cigarettes, matches and barbecue coals and don't park vehicle in high grass where a hot catalytic converter or tailpipe can start a fire.

When conditions are conducive for the rapid spread of wildfires, the National Weather Service issues Fire Weather Watches and Red Flag Warnings which indicate the location and time of the greatest threat.

Information regarding extreme temperatures and weather conditions conducive to the spreading of wildfires can be obtained by visiting the National Weather Service Miami Forecast Office website at [www.weather.gov/southflorida](http://www.weather.gov/southflorida) and clicking on the Local Hazards tab.